

Building the People's Palaces

Like many of the cheap machine-made goods exported to world markets during the 19th century, the image of the English seaside was 'Made in Manchester'. Manchester architects designed the pleasure buildings whose forms are now a useful abbreviation for the whole of English resort development, Blackpool Tower and Winter Gardens. Although architects throughout England, Wales and the Isle of Man undertook commissions for seaside pleasure buildings during the boom years around the turn of the century, undoubtedly the greatest contribution to resort design was made by architects in groups of resorts far from the influence of London architects and other nationally known practices. Where local men were overlooked for all but the smallest commissions, a more anodyne architecture was the result.

During the 1870-1914 period, nationally known architectural practices, often but not always London-based, dominated the design of seaside pleasure buildings along the south and south-west coasts, and in the north-east. In East Anglia and the north-west (including the Welsh resorts) local and regionally important practices designed the majority of the sea front buildings, giving a distinctive style to these resorts. The reason for this divide in commissions was largely financial. North-western resort developments were financed to a great extent by Yorkshire and Lancashire money; the region developed its own resorts, using its own architects, initially to provide facilities for its northern catchment area, although the resorts rapidly became nationally important. In East Anglia, generally smaller developments, mainly locally financed, were left in the hands of a small number of influential local practices. For the southern resorts, the situation was completely different, with London money featuring strongly in their development and famous architects used by companies as a means of attracting investors. In the north-east, resort development was either early, needing prestigious names to help raise funds, or late and relatively small scale, thus involving only local architects. The large urban centres were too far away to produce the intensity of sea front development which occurred in the north-west or along the south coast.

Despite this divide in architectural practice between the north-west, East Anglia, and the rest, a small number of architects may be classified as of national importance in the design of seaside pleasure buildings, the foremost of those being Eugenius Birch (1848-84). Birch built piers or pier pavilions between 1853 and 1884 at Margate, Blackpool, Brighton, Aberystwyth, Deal, Eastbourne, Hastings, Lytham, Plymouth, Scarborough, New Brighton, Weston-super-Mare and Hornsea, and was also involved with the design of recreational aquaria, docks, waterworks and railways. Only in the resorts of late-developing East Anglia did Birch leave no trace. After the Brighton Royal Pavilion, Birch's use of the Oriental style acted as the main impetus for the spread of Oriental imagery throughout the English seaside. Yet, perhaps because of the demise of most of his seaside works, he remains a little known figure.

Because of the financial power of national theatre chains, theatre architecture at the resorts was often undertaken by London-based or nationally known practices, their designs sometimes supervised during construction by local men. Frank Matcham (1854-1920), the leading turn-of-the-century theatre and music hall architect, built or altered 15 seaside theatres between 1888 and 1907, at Blackpool, Brighton, Douglas, Eastbourne, Great Yarmouth, Morecambe, Portsmouth, Southport, Southsea and South Shields, making a truly national impact on the seaside. Strangely, his greatest contribution to seaside architecture was not a theatre but the hugely decorative Blackpool Tower Ballroom of 1898-9.

Matcham's great rival, C. J. (Charles John) Phipps (1835-97), built nine seaside theatres during 1865-95; all were on the south coast, though his inland practice extended as far afield as Aberdeen, Dublin and Swansea. Of the other national theatre practices, Bertie Crewe (d1937) designed three seaside Hippodromes, again on the south coast, in 1908-09, while Ernest Augustus Runtz (1859-1913) worked at Lowestoft, Hastings and Hove. The Hastings Marine Palace of Varieties (1897-99), with its pompous Spanish Renaissance terracotta facade, was his best seaside work.

Neither Phipps, Crewe nor Runtz made a significant contribution to seaside architectural style, but Oswald Cane Wylson (1859-1925) and Charles Long (d1906), with their work at Blackpool's Winter Gardens (Pavilion, 1897) and Alhambra (1897-99), were part of the architectural response to the needs of the massed seaside crowds for indoor entertainment. Wylson and Long were theatre, music hall and public house designers, with 19 theatres and halls to their credit between 1893 and 1908.

The most unusual of the nationally important seaside architects were John Norton (1923-1904) and Philip Edward Masey (1823-97), designers of Great Yarmouth Aquarium (1875-6) and Tynemouth Winter Garden (1876-8), both buildings incorporating an aquarium and a winter garden, and at the forefront of provision of rational recreation at the seaside. Neither development was successful, though the directors of the companies promoting the buildings appear to have profited from the ventures at the expense of the shareholders. Norton, a pupil of Benjamin Ferrey, had a large and lucrative country house practice, and his otherwise inexplicable involvement with the shady world of the aquarium companies must be attributed to his association with Masey.

On the south and south-west coasts, the work of locally known architects made a strong contribution to resort development, despite the presence of buildings by Birch, Matcham, Phipps and Runtz. At Brighton, where all four worked between 1863 and 1908 (Runtz at Hove), the outstanding Oriental-style Palace Pier and Theatre (1891-1901) was designed by London engineer R. St George Moore, who also built the St Leonards Pier in 1888-91. Both piers were sophisticated engineering works; Moore had previously been responsible for the reconstruction of a large estate in County Waterford in 1875-9, and has no other record of seaside building. Local Board or estate architects often built on south coast sea fronts when London men

were not brought in; Henry Currey (1820-1900), trained under Decimus Burton, built for the 7th Duke of Devonshire at Eastbourne, his work including the Winter Garden (1874) and Devonshire Park Theatre (1884). The prolific W H. Gould, architect and surveyor to Ilfracombe's Local Board, was responsible for the 1888 Victoria Pavilion, a small winter garden on the resort's Promenade.

At Paignton, local man George Soudon Bridgman (1839-1925) designed the spacious town centre and a variety of pleasure buildings: the Oldway House Theatre (1873), Pier and Pavilion (1878-9) and Palace Theatre (1890), the latter built as a public hall. Frank Matcham, born in Newton Abbot, worked briefly in Bridgman's office around 1868, then left for a London apprenticeship before returning to Bridgman as Senior Assistant in the early 1870s; he remained in Paignton until about 1875. Matcham was partially responsible for the design of the Oldway House Theatre, a private theatre in the house of Isaac Singer, the founder of the sewing machine company, who specified French Renaissance detail for his home. Bridgman was financially involved with the local company promoting the Pier.

In the Edwardian era, architects of real originality began to contribute designs to the southern and north-eastern seaside. At Southsea, Portsmouth architect G. E. Smith (1870-1944) produced the South Parade Pier Pavilion in 1908, a domed and turreted model in Edwardian Baroque with Art Nouveau touches. W. H. Watkins of Bristol, a cinema architect, designed the Regent Street Picture House, Weston-super-Mare (1913) in his usual Baroque style. The Classical white pleasure dome of Spanish City was built at Whitley Bay in 1910 by the Newcastle upon Tyne practice of James Thoburn Cackett (1860-1928) and R. Burns Dick (1869-1955).

Although elegant, exciting and original seaside buildings were produced on the southern and north-eastern coasts, the home of English seaside architecture must be, if not Manchester, then East Anglia and the north-west, where the impetus of the market led to the construction of bigger, better and more unusual pleasure buildings. The boom years for the East Anglian resorts were the 1890s and particularly the early 1900s; in Great Yarmouth and adjoining, genteel Gorleston, out of the 15 substantial pleasure buildings erected between 1876 and the First World War, 12 opened after the turn of the century but only two in the 1890s. Funding for Yarmouth's entertainment ventures came from local firms acting as developers, showmen from around the region and a few London financiers. Yarmouth people, as investors, took no great interest in the development of their sea front, and in 1903 the Corporation stepped in and began improvements to the promenade, Marine Parade.

Because of the strong local and regional financial influences on sea front development, the design of Yarmouth's pleasure buildings was dominated by local architectural practices, men known to the promoters of entertainment ventures. The Cockrill family, with works in Gorleston, Yarmouth and Lowestoft, and Arthur Hewitt, who designed the Gem and Empire cinemas on Marine Parade, were central figures in the resort's

architectural development. The architectural Cockrill dynasty came to the fore in the middle of the 19th century with builder William Cockrill of Gorleston, whose sons John William (1849-1924), William Ballard and Joseph James (c1857-1932) all followed their father into architecture or building. J. W. Cockrill attended Yarmouth School of Art during 1862-70, though his architectural practice began in 1869 and lasted until 1882, when he became surveyor to Yarmouth Corporation. He was particularly interested in the development of ceramics and concrete; his sobriquet 'Concrete' Cockrill arose from his efforts to persuade property owners to concrete over the unpaved surfaces of the Rows, Yarmouth's system of narrow lanes. He invented a facing wall tile, the Cockrill tile, which he patented with Doulton's in 1893; it obviated the need for shuttering during the building of concrete walls by acting as a retainer for the concrete. The L-shaped Cockrill tile was used in many Yarmouth buildings around the turn of the century.

'Concrete' Cockrill's first seaside pleasure building was the Gorleston Pavilion, planned by Yarmouth Corporation in 1899 and designed in 1901; it was a delightful four domed music hall in red brick and terracotta, with window tracery based on sketches Cockrill made of St Catherine's Church in Brussels. In 1903 J. W. Cockrill produced for the Corporation one of the most idiosyncratic buildings of the English seaside, the Wellington Pier Pavilion at the south end of Marine Parade. It combined Art Nouveau style and European exhibition pavilion design using towers, domes and finials with clean white lines and metallic Uralite cladding; the whole prefigured 1930s Modern Movement seaside buildings. The design may have been a product of Cockrill's travels abroad, or perhaps originated in ideas gleaned from foreign travellers passing through the port of Yarmouth. Although reclad during the 1950s and now missing some of its decorative elements, the Pavilion remains a fine example of seaside idiosyncrasy.

J. W. Cockrill had at least three sons, all of whom became architects. Ralph Scott (b1879) was the eldest, followed by Owen Hanworth (1882-1959) and Gilbert Scott (1885-1926). O. H. Cockrill was articled to his father before beginning practice in Southend in 1923, while G. S. Cockrill, an Associate member of the RIBA, died at the age of 41 as a result of illness attributed to his war service with the Royal Engineers. Ralph Scott Cockrill designed the exciting Art Nouveau Yarmouth Hippodrome in 1903 and probably the Lowestoft Hippodrome in 1904, both for the ex-circus performer George Gilbert. In 1904, with the support of local businessmen, Gilbert attempted to float a company to buy the two Hippodromes, thus providing extra capital, but investors did not respond and the venture collapsed. R. S. Cockrill also designed Lowestoft's Palace Concert Hall (1912-13) for a Yarmouth consortium, consisting of solicitors and developers Ferrier & Ferrier, and E. V. Barr Ltd, an entertainments company. Both these firms had been involved with Yarmouth sea front development since the early 1900s.

There were other architectural Cockrills: Kenneth Arthur Cockrill practised in Gorleston between 1914 and 1928, if not longer, and Thomas Cockrill, an architect and engineer, practised in Yarmouth in the 1920s. K. A.

Cockrill may have been a son of 'Concrete' Cockrill, while Thomas may have been a grandson. The total Cockrill contribution to the architectural development of the twin resorts is significant and yet to be fully investigated.

The inventive Art Nouveau style of J. W. and Ralph Scott Cockrill was complemented on Yarmouth sea front by the heavyweight ceramic Classicism of Arthur Samuel Hewitt's two cinemas, the Gem and the Empire. Hewitt (dc1922), a neglected but interesting architect, was articled to John Bond Pearce of Norwich, the designer of Yarmouth Town Hall (1880-82), and was practising in Yarmouth by 1883; possibly the Town Hall commission first brought Hewitt to Yarmouth. He built banks and offices near the Town Hall and several small buildings on Marine Parade before his most significant works, the Gem (1908) and Empire (1911), both still functioning cinemas. Their Edwardian Baroque faience facades continue to attract the crowds.

In the north-west two little known Manchester architectural practices, Maxwell & Tuke and Mangnall & Littlewoods, were responsible for the design of most of the major late Victorian and Edwardian seaside pleasure palaces, although Eugenius Birch and Frank Matcham built significantly at Morecambe, Southport and especially Blackpool, and local architects made important but smaller contributions. At Llandudno, George Alfred Humphreys (1865-1948) designed the Prince's (1880s) and Grand (1890) theatres. He was agent for Lord Mostyn's Estates in Llandudno, designed many domestic and commercial buildings in the town and the Colonnade Shelter on the sea front, as well as developing the town plan. The incomplete Morecambe Tower (1899-1900), an Oriental extravaganza, was the work of William Hampden Sugden (1849-1921) and William Arthur Sugden (1868-1927) of Keighley. The Sugdens, probably cousins, ran a domestic practice in Keighley from the 1880s. Their commission for this uncharacteristic seaside design probably originated with personal contacts in the Bradford-based company promoting the Tower. At Southport, local architect George Edward Tonge (1876-1956) designed most of the town's cinemas, including the Palladium and Picture Palace (both 1914). Tonge practised in Southport 1903-1948 and was one of the north's principal cinema architects; he was articled to W. Howarth of Bolton, who designed the Morecambe Alhambra Theatre (1901). The Alhambra was probably Bolton-born Tonge's first taste of seaside architectural practice.

Manchester influence on the north-western seaside did not stem solely from the output of two large practices. John Dent Harker (1861-1933) of Manchester built Blackpool's South Pier Pavilion (1893) and Empire (1895). The Empire, a flat-floored ballroom-cum-music hall, was converted to a circus in 1900 and renamed the Hippodrome. Harker's Pavilion lasted until 1958, when it was destroyed by fire. Manchester architect Richard Knill Freeman (1838/9-1904) built Blackpool's North Pier Theatre and Central Pier Pavilion (both 1897), and the Southport Pier Pavilion (1902). Freeman, who built up an extensive Lancashire practice, won the Central Pier commission in a competition organised by its owners, the Blackpool Jetty Company. He was partnered by Frank Freeman in the early 1900s when they worked on

Southport Pier Pavilion, a massive, highly glazed and slightly Orientalised shed at the shore end of the Pier.

The twenty-six year long architectural partnership between James Maxwell (1838/9-93) and William Charles Tuke (1841/2-93) produced three of the biggest and certainly the most memorable of all English seaside pleasure buildings. Southport Winter Gardens (1874), Blackpool Tower Buildings (1891-4) and the New Brighton Tower (1897-8) were all the work of this Manchester practice, carried on by Maxwell's son, Francis William Maxwell, after the death of both original partners within months of each other in 1893.

James Maxwell, head of the practice, was the son of a plumber from Haslingden, a few miles north of Manchester. He was articled to Bury architect Thomas Holmes before setting up on his own account in 1859. The business prospered; he was placed third in the competition for Rochdale Town Hall in 1864, and the following year employed William Tuke as a clerk. Tuke became a partner in 1867. Tuke came from a famous Yorkshire Quaker family of surveyors, his great-grandfather, John, having produced a map of the City of York in 1792. John's son, Daniel, made the first survey of the County of Yorkshire, and his son, William Tuke's father, was an architect and surveyor. William Tuke trained in Bradford and Manchester before joining Maxwell; Maxwell was a prominent Congregationalist, so perhaps the dissenting tradition explains their connection. They built several Methodist and Nonconformist chapels in the early years of their partnership, as well as stores for the Co-operative Society and schools for the Manchester School Board.

Their first seaside building was at Southport, where they won a competition to build the Cambridge Hall (1872-4), an eye-catching French Gothic, towered pile. The great glasshouse followed on Southport sea front in 1874, promoted by a company in which the practice had a large financial interest. Francis Maxwell was a shareholder in the company which took over the Winter Gardens in 1898 after the collapse of the original promoters. 1874 was also the year in which Maxwell helped to found the St Anne's-on-the-Sea Land and Building Company which developed the select resort. Maxwell & Tuke were appointed as architects and land agents; plans drawn up by the practice in 1875 included a large conservatory; but this was never built and, after a dispute in 1877, the practice resigned. Both Maxwell and Tuke retained their financial interests in the development of St Anne's and owned substantial sites there; William Tuke lived in St Anne's for many years.

Maxwell & Tuke's next iron and glass design was the competition-winning Manchester Royal Jubilee Exhibition Building, erected in Trafford Park in 1886-7 by Manchester contractors Messrs Heenan & Froude. Maxwell & Tuke completed the Douglas Head Marine Drive with its rugged castellated gateway in 1891 and Blackpool Tower followed, the foundation stone laid in the same year. These structures could hardly have been more contrasting, but interconnections between the relevant Douglas and Blackpool promoting companies may have led to the practice gaining the Tower commission. The contractors for Blackpool Tower were again Heenan &

Froude, though the Tower itself was erected by J. Bell of Formby. Maxwell & Tuke also engaged a consultant engineer, R. J. G. Read of London, who had experience of similar structures. The crow's nest was placed in position at the top of the Tower on the day of James Maxwell's death, 28 September 1893. Tuke had died six months earlier, the practice leaving a legacy of buildings as far afield as Ecuador and Yokohama, as well as Lancashire, Yorkshire and the Isle of Man. Francis Maxwell took over the Maxwell & Tuke practice, which continued under the same name. Harry S. Fairhurst (1869-1945) was a pupil around 1889; he later designed majestic warehouses in the commercial district of Manchester.

Preparations for the construction of the New Brighton Tower began in 1895, and the Tower Buildings, presumably designed by Francis Maxwell, opened in 1898; the Tower was almost 50 ft higher than his father's Blackpool Tower. The practice seems to have built little in the early 1900s, and its last recorded work was the Whitehead Clock Tower, Bury (1914). The work of Maxwell & Tuke interspersed mundane banks, schools and offices with three glorious seaside landmarks; although engineers were employed on these works, Tuke and the two Maxwells were responsible for the designs and collaborated with the contractors during construction. Though many attempted to build 'Eiffel Towers' in England, only Maxwell & Tuke succeeded, unsung heroes of the English seaside who rose to the challenge of designing the pleasure domes. Their work abroad remains unknown, but may explain their architectural development more logically than the catalogue of humdrum tasks they undertook around Manchester. They were financially involved in several of their seaside projects, and were pragmatic stylists, producing vast but attractive decorative spaces. For their small-scale work they often adopted the Queen Anne Revival style, which is echoed in the base buildings of both towers, but their most inventive work was at Southport, with the jolly Cambridge Hall and the monumental Winter Gardens.

Manchester was also home to Mangnall & Littlewoods, in fact the architectural practice of brothers John and William Henry Littlewood. The Littlewoods were sons of architect Joshua Littlewood (1794-1866) of Holmfirth near Huddersfield. John Littlewood (1829/30-1901) was articled to Travis & Mangnall of Manchester in 1850, and was joined by his brother in 1855. Within a few years Travis retired, and John Littlewood became Mangnall's partner; on the death of Mangnall in 1874, William Henry Littlewood (1839/40-1921) became a partner in the firm which was known thereafter as Mangnall & Littlewoods. The brothers were keen and successful competition entrants, winning contests for Manchester Gasworks (1876), Manchester Fish Market (1877) and Salford Baths (1889). Their first experience of seaside work came at Southport with the Victoria (1876) and the Palace (1880) Hotels. By the mid-1890s the practice was tackling a substantial number of commissions throughout Lancashire and the Isle of Man, and in 1895 the bewhiskered brothers entered the competition to enlarge Blackpool Winter Gardens. None of their previous experience can have prepared them to design pleasure buildings on such a grand scale, but they produced such a superlative

decorative proposal for the Empress Ballroom, and probably the adjoining Indian Lounge, that they were adjudged winners. The additions to the Winter Gardens opened in 1896 and proved popular.

Possibly as a result of their success in Blackpool, the Littlewoods were invited to extend Morecambe Winter Gardens, which they did in the form of the Victoria Pavilion (1897); they also added a Pavilion to the resort's Central Pier. The Central Pier Pavilion (1897) was known as the Taj Mahal of the North because of its intricate mass of domes and towers.

They designed the Morecambe Hotel Metropole (1897), another commission from a winning competition entry. They went on to build Bridlington New Spa Theatre (1899) and the Colwyn Bay Pier and Pavilion (1900), with a Renaissance hall and Moorish ticket kiosks, before the death of John Littlewood in September 1901.

W. H. Littlewood carried on alone, though still as Mangnall & Littlewoods. He undertook several more seaside commissions, including Bridlington Grand Pavilion (1906), a 3,000 seat Classical design, and the Edwardian Baroque style Pavilion Theatre (1908) in Weymouth, before retiring around 1910. His most important commission during the 1900s was rebuilding the Opera House in Blackpool Winter Gardens. Consideration had been given to replacing the Frank Matcham-designed Opera House about 1902, but it was 1910 before work began and June 1911 when W. H. Littlewood's French Classical Opera House opened. The Littlewoods generally used Classical styles for their seaside pleasure buildings, adapted with Oriental overtones for pier designs. Their work always included complex, highly decorative forms, and this seems to have been the secret of their success. The buildings were popular with promoters and holidaymakers alike.

The best work of the Littlewood brothers was carried out in Blackpool and especially Morecambe, but certainly they have a stronger claim to be a truly national seaside practice than Maxwell & Tuke, though the work of the latter had a greater national impact. Birch, Matcham; and Manchester's Maxwell & Tuke and Mangnall & Littlewoods, the most prolific and best of the seaside architects, stylistically had little in common except a use of Oriental motifs as a sign denoting a pleasure building. Their styles expanded inventively on Baroque Classicism, using a mixture of colours and decorative forms to produce buildings that were attractive and novel. The buildings themselves were often altered as fashion dictated; decoration grew outdated and new crazes generated changes of form. The basis of a popular seaside building in the boom years, indeed, of turn of the century seaside architectural style, was an accepted Classical form overlaid by unexpected forms, motifs and colours signifying pleasure. The seaside architects produced buildings which combined security with excitement, thus advertising guaranteed enjoyment. Resorts, through their pleasure palaces, offered the certainty of having fun.